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 **TACKLING TURNAROUND AT SHAWNEE HIGH SCHOOL**

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Ky. Turnaround School Reaps Double-Digit Gains

By **Alyson Klein**

The Obama administration's four school turnaround models under the federal School Improvement Grant program remain controversial, but first year results from at least one high school in Kentucky are promising.

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The Academy@Shawnee—part of the 98,000-student Jefferson County school district, which includes the city of Louisville—made adequate yearly progress, or AYP, for the first time in its history, according to information released last week by the Kentucky Department of Education.

The school made progress under the law's "safe harbor" provision, which allows schools that post more than 10 percent achievement growth to be considered as being on track to meet the law's objectives, even if those schools don't hit state proficiency targets.

And the Academy@Shawnee boasted double-digit increases in core subjects. Forty-five percent of students scored at the proficient level in reading, up from 22.58 percent in 2010, and 24.75 percent students scored at the proficient level in mathematics, up from 4.65 percent last year.

"There has been a great deal of elation across the board," said Keith Look, the school's principal. "There have been multiple damp eyes amongst the staff. ... We all say the right things, that all kids can learn, but rarely do we get an opportunity to say, absolutely, this is why we still know this to be true."

Education Week followed the Academy@Shawnee throughout its first year in the SIG program, which is targeted at improving the lowest 5 percent of schools in each state in terms of student performance.

The program, created under the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, was supercharged with \$3 billion under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, in 2009. More than 730 schools participate nationally. States had to choose one of four school improvement models, some of which require



About This Series

Throughout the school year, *Education Week* is chronicling Principal Keith Look and his team at the Academy @ Shawnee in Louisville, Ky., while they work to transform the long-troubled campus as part of a \$3.5 billion federal push to turn around thousands of low-performing schools. For previous installments in this series and multimedia features, read the rest of the series "[Tackling Turnaround at Shawnee High School.](#)"

drastic actions, such as shutting down a school, turning it over to a charter operator, or removing half the staff.

Shawnee's High Stakes

In nearly all cases, the principal of a SIG school also is supposed to be replaced. Mr. Look was an exception, in part because he had been on the job less than three years, and in part because a team of state auditors found that he was equipped to lead Shawnee's transition.

Still, Mr. Look's job was on the line. If the school hadn't moved the needle on student achievement, he might have lost his position.

Shawnee chose the SIG model known as "turnaround," which requires replacing half the staff. Mr. Look recruited some of Jefferson County's best teachers to fill those vacancies, including six educators who had worked for the central district office in professional development. The state also sent in three experienced educators—a math specialist, a literacy specialist, and a mentor for Mr. Look—to work with the staff on using student data to inform instruction.



Education Week is collaborating with education news sites in Chicago, Colorado, New York and Philadelphia on a collection that chronicles school turnaround efforts across the country. Read the [collection](#).

This year, Shawnee will have to adjust to a new assessment system, as Kentucky and other states make the transition to the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

"It's a new game, so we'll start over again," Mr. Look said.